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INTERNATIONAL FOOD
POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

sustainable options for ending hunger and poverty

ETHIOPIA
THE URBAN FOOD-FOR-WORK PROJECT

IFPRI assessed CARE-Ethiopia's Urban Food-for-Work Project in order to draw lessons about how to work effectively in urban areas.

Ethiopia is only 18 percent urban, but one-fourth of these urban dwellers, about 3.1 million people, live in Addis Ababa. Rampant poverty and lack of government resources have meant that many infrastructure needs go unmet. CARE-Ethiopia's Urban Food-for-Work program (UFFW) attempts to meet some of the infrastructure needs of the poorest neighborhoods.

UFFW began in 1997 based on an agreement between the municipality of Addis Ababa and CARE. CARE targets the program to extremely poor areas. The first phase of the project (1997-98) took place in areas where at least 75 percent of the households earned less than 250 birr (about US$40) per month (changed to 500 birr, or about US$60, for the second phase, in 1999-2000).

The objectives of UFFW are to:

- Provide basic roads and latrines to marginal urban communities in Addis Ababa;
- Provide short-term employment opportunities in the form of food-for-work to the unemployed and underemployed residents of these communities; and
- Enhance the capacity of community groups to participate in future self-help development endeavors.

As of April 2001, CARE had worked in 25 kebeles, or communities, in Addis Ababa. Through Multi-Purpose Infrastructure Development Committees (MPIDCs) each community is actively involved in all stages of the project, including selecting sites and activities, raising money, and selecting the workforce. The MPIDCs are also responsible for maintaining the infrastructure when completed. At the conclusion of the project's construction, CARE officially hands over the new structures to the community.

For these projects the community provides all unskilled laborers, the majority of whom are often women. Workers are paid in food (donated wheat and oil) according to attendance and productivity. In coordination with the community, CARE engineers and consultants determine locations of roads and latrines and provide MPIDCs with cost and construction information. CARE also supervises construction and provides a social development worker to liaise with the community.

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RESEARCH FOCUS

Project Leader: James Garrett

IFPRI's study used a qualitative approach to look at UFFW's operation and effects. Interviews with key actors in the UFFW program complemented a thorough review of available documentation. These interviews were carried out in a purposive sample of the neighborhoods where CARE has worked so far (4 of 25).

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

The UFFW project had a number of benefits for participating communities. The roads built by the UFFW project significantly improved residents' mobility, particularly during the rainy season. Accompanying infrastructure such as drains and culverts reduced flooding. In addition, the food payments reduced food insecurity during periods when the laborers were working. The project also had a positive impact on women, who frequently noted that participating in the project increased their confidence in their own abilities. The impact of roads on employment and markets, however, is uncertain. Almost all of the unskilled laborers who participated said that the project had not helped them get

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better jobs; they just went back to what they were doing before to earn money.

The UFFW project is an example of an appropriate way to meet the infrastructure needs of the urban poor, largely through its labor-intensive, community-based approach. Its experience suggests that urban programming may not be as difficult as once perceived.

The project's successes were made possible by several important actions and approaches. First, CARE worked effectively with government authorities. They began by identifying important parties, and they kept each stakeholder informed. CARE also made sure responsibilites were clear and used legal documents as tools. All major stakeholders signed agreements that not only provided legal protection to CARE, but also ensured that everyone agreed to and understood their roles and responsibilities.

Second, CARE emphasized community ownership. All households had to make a monetary contribution. This requirement became problematic in large areas, where the demand for work was greater than the amount of work available, and projects did not reach all areas. In this case, some households felt they had paid money for benefits they did not receive.

Third, CARE set up a transparent, participatory worker-selection process that was perceived as fair.

Fourth, workers were generally satisfied with the payment amount, schedule, package quantity, and food items. However, because workers' wages were paid in food every two weeks, a few beneficiaries had problems finding storage space in their small houses. CARE may wish to monitor this issue and consider distributing smaller quantities at a time (while giving the same total value).

Fifth, CARE has done a reasonable job in explaining payment procedures to participants. By measuring output openly with a team of individuals, including a workers' representative, CARE has ensured a transparent, trustworthy process.

Sixth, UFFW incorporated a number of features that are considered "good practice" in public works design and operation, including the following:

- The wage rate was less than the market rate for unskilled labor.
- The project chose workers who had few other employment opportunities.
- Works were labor-intensive.
- A high proportion of the cost was for labor.
- Works explicitly benefited the poor.
- Works benefited workers in their own areas.
- Absenteeism was monitored and accounted for in pay.
- The skills required of workers were appropriate to their level of expertise.
- The community participated in all aspects of the project, especially site selection and targeting.
- Authority was decentralized to the local level.
- Sufficient nonfood resources and materials were provided to carry out the project.
- Logistics and staffing were appropriate.

The UFFW project even improved on these "good practices" by using community members to select poor workers (a good way to deal with the difficulty of targeting in a heterogeneous urban environment) and using a procedure to calculate payments that took into account both group and individual effort and productivity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- UFFW is a relief rather than development program that provides permanent employment. For longer-term results, UFFW may need to integrate or complement other development activities.
- For poor urban residents the rainy season is the most difficult time of year, when prices rise and incomes fall. If CARE could undertake its construction activities at these times, UFFW could enhance its benefits by functioning as a safety net in the time of greatest need.
- UFFW needs to establish mechanisms to ensure maintenance after CARE withdraws. CARE could provide a maintenance fund as a part of project costs or work with MPIDCs to secure a fund to help with maintenance.
- This project failed to provide long-term food security. Projects like this one should address long-term alleviation of poverty and hunger by seeking to improve participants' labor skills and linking beneficiaries with employers across the city.
- CARE should implement some type of worker's insurance to assist injured workers.
- CARE could improve on the positive impacts UFFW has on women by adding complementary programming on women's rights and on community health.
- Poverty and food insecurity in urban areas hardly ever arise from lack of food availability. The problem is lack of access to food, owing to lack of income for buying food. Providing cash instead of food is generally thought to be a more appropriate response to hunger in cities.

DONORS AND COLLABORATORS

- CARE-Ethiopia
- CARE-USA

PUBLICATION

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